DOCTOR WHO

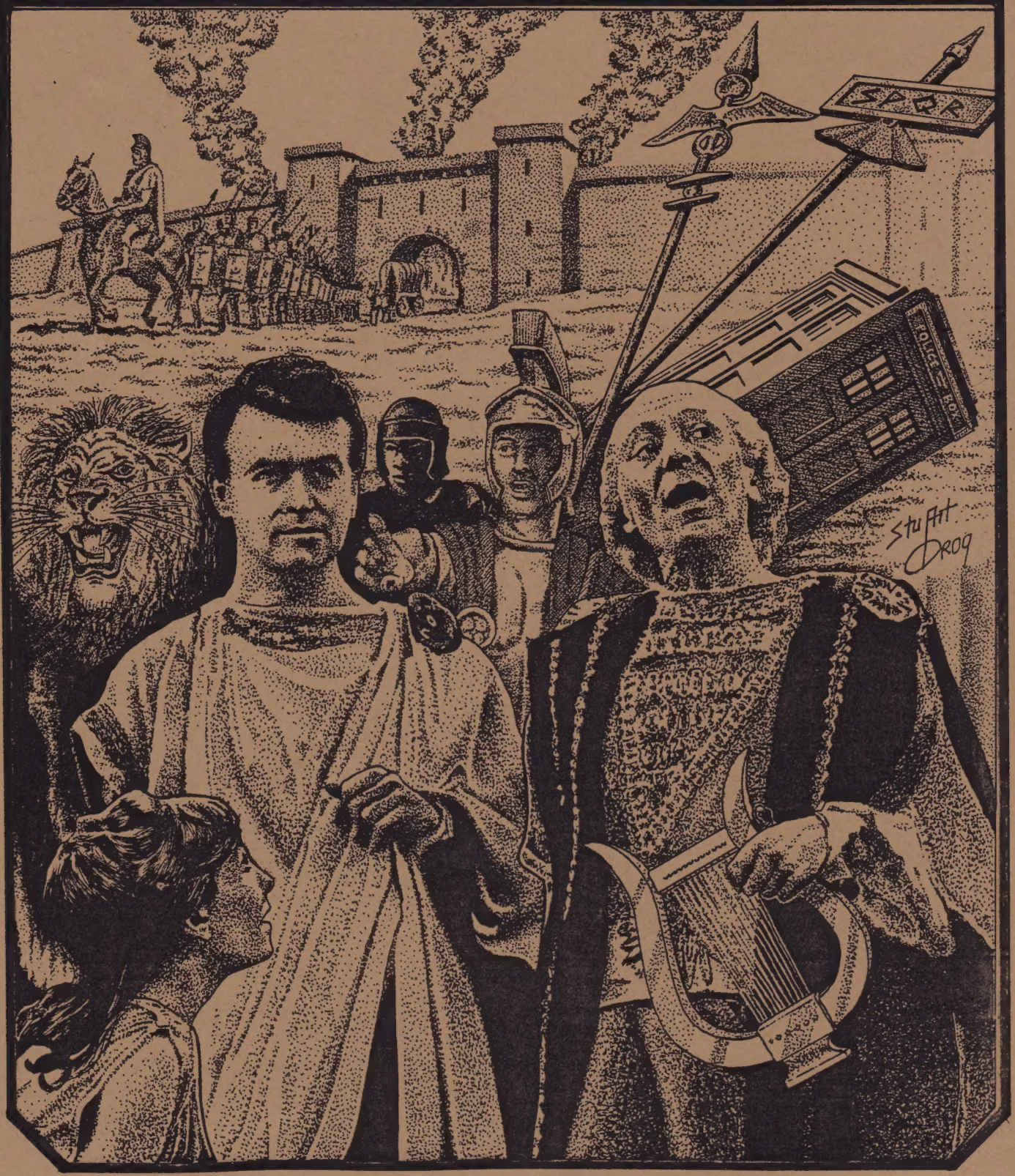
SERIAL M

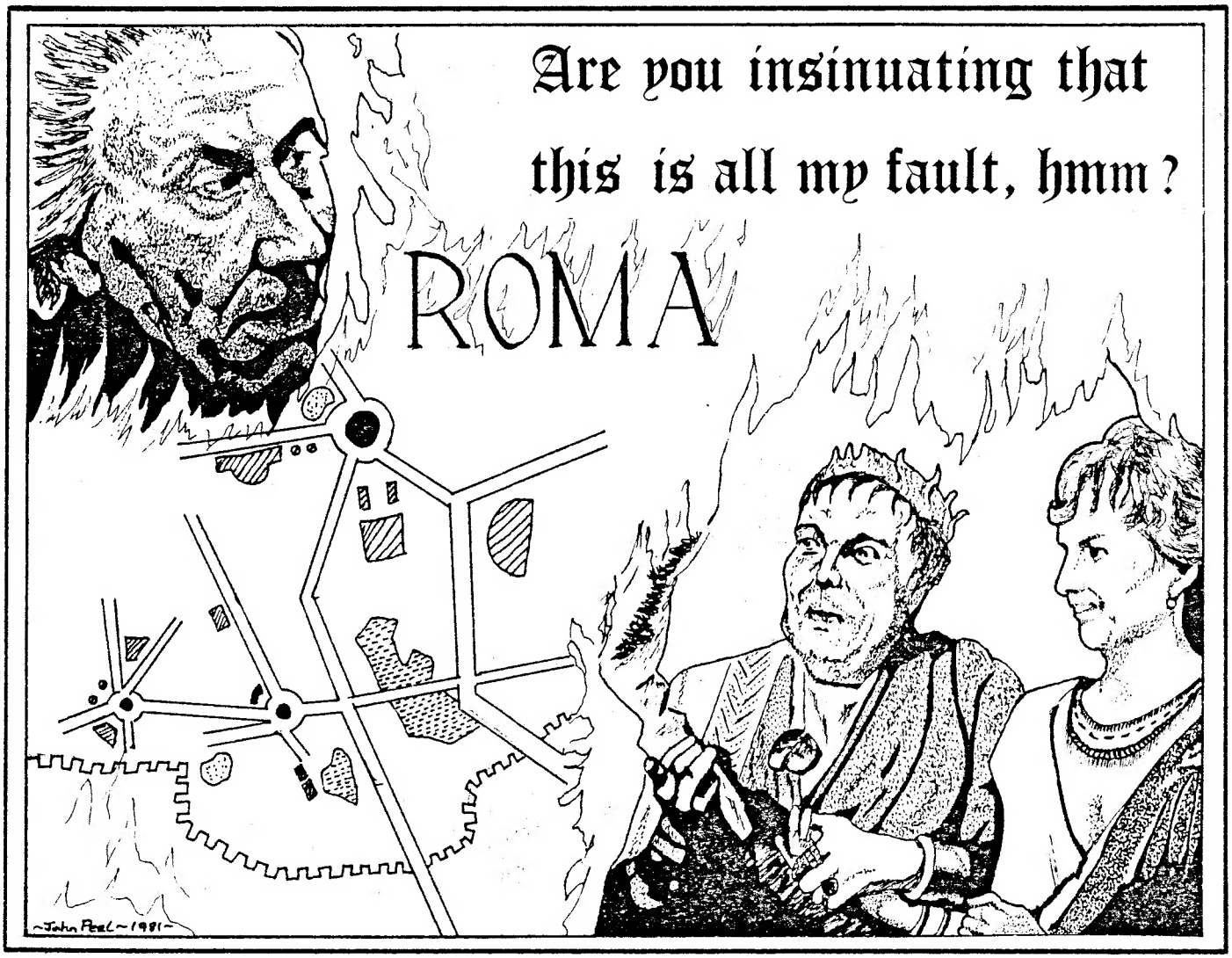
The Romans

BY

DENNIS SPOONER

An Adventure in Space & Time





Since their 'bumpy' arrival on Earth in the year 64 AD, the Doctor and his crew of three have been resting in luxury in a villa just outside Rome. However, the Doctor and Vicki, feeling restless, set off to visit Rome itself. Ian and Barbara, quite content to remain at the villa, are attacked by slave traders and dragged away to market. Ian is sold as a galley slave, and Barbara is bought as a handmaiden for the Emperor Nero's household by the slave-supervisor, a shifty, bald-headed man called Tavius.

The Doctor is mistaken for the recently murdered Corinthian lyre-player Maximus Pettulian, and escorted to Nero's palace. Unknown to him and Vicki, Barbara is also at the palace and being harrassed by the amorous Nero. The Doctor is more concerned with the task ahead of him - to play the lyre for the Emperor; and the Doctor cannot play a note of music!

When a violent storm whips up, the galley ship is wrecked and Ian, with a fellow slave, Delos, find themselves freed. However, their freedom is short-lived. Shortly after returning to Rome, they are recaptured and trained as gladiators. Worse than this, they are then made to face each other in the Arena! Here, Ian finds Barbara, and determines to release her.

The Doctor, meanwhile, has neatly talked his way out of several executions, but is confronted by Nero with the idea of playing his lyre again - this time to an audience of lions! (See 'Drama Extract' - '12-04') But the Doctor has discovered that Maximus Pettulian was travelling to Rome to assassinate Nero, under Tavius' supervision at the palace. By accidentally setting fire to Nero's plans for a new Rome, the Doctor inspires the lunatic Emperor to start the great fire, under cover of which the four travellers escape back to the TARDIS.

Something is wrong, and Ian watches as the Doctor struggles with the instruments on the console. A powerful force is plucking the TARDIS off its route...

DRAMA EXTRACT

"Well, we must be going, child," the Doctor said, motioning Vicki to him. "I want to leave here as soon as it's dark."

The young orphan looked up from studying Nero's plans for a redesigned Rome. "Oh, but Doctor..."

"Now, now, now, there'll be no arguments. You will do as I say." He gathered up his robe and prepared to leave.

"Maximus!"

A voice behind him stopped the Doctor in his tracks. There was no mistaking those effusive, regal tones. Adopting his blandest and most supercilious smile, he turned and greeted the Emperor.

"My dear Caesar Nero," he responded warmly.

"I have a little surprise for you. Guess what it is," said Nero with a twinkling gleam in his eyes.

Oho, thought the Doctor, here it comes; the benign invitation to attend your own execution. Well, if he can play games, then so can I. He adopted a thoughtful expression. "Now let me think. You want me to play in the arena?"

The smile vanished from Nero's face, replaced by the crestfallen look of one who has found a long-held secret to be common knowledge. "You guessed."

"It's no problem at all," blustered the Doctor. "After all, you want to do your very best for your fellow artists. Why not the Arena?"

"Yes, yes, of course," blustered Nero, desperate to regain some lost ground. "That is exactly right."

"Well, I promise you, I will try to make it a roaring success."

He couldn't know, thought Nero, who could have told him? Anxiously, he enquired, "You'll have to play something special, you know."

"Of course, of course. Something serious, yes. Something they can really get their teeth into."

"You can't know, you can't," muttered Nero petulantly, more to himself than for the Doctor's benefit. "I've told no-one."

"Caesar Nero. I've always wanted to put on a good show; to give a great performance. After all, who knows, if I go down well, I might even make it my farewell performance. You see, I've always wanted to be considered as an artist of some taste, generally regarded as palatable, hmm?"

The Doctor beamed at the Emperor's increasing discomfiture. He clasped his hands together behind his back, not noticing as he did so that the rays from the afternoon sun were refracting through the lenses of his glasses onto the parchment map of Nero's Rome. "But I must be boring you," he continued. "Surely you must have so many other important things to attend to without standing here, chewing over the facts with me. Good gracious!" The Doctor paused, sniffing the sudden pungent aroma in the room. "There's something burning."

"My plans!" shrieked Nero, noticing the rapidly charring parchments. Quickly he seized them and tried to snuff out the flames - but they were too strong. "You fool! You idiot! A lifetime's work. I'll have you both killed over and over again...Guards! Guards!"

Several footsoldiers entered the room and looked on at the incredible sight of their Emperor, almost apoplectic with despair. "Fool. Idiot. Traitor," he ranted. "I'll have you tied to a stake in the Arena on an island with water all around it. And in the water there will be alligators. And the water level will be raised, and the alligators will get you. Fool, traitor..." the tirade abruptly ceased. A new gleam shone in his eyes as he watched the plans of Rome burning. "Brilliant! You are a genius!" he exclaimed joyously.

STORY REVIEW

PAUL MOUNT

With Verity Lambert still in the Producer's chair, joined now by Dennis Spooner as story editor, it's very easy to see that, in the second season of 'Doctor Who', with their early successes within the basic framework of the series behind them, the production team were confident enough to experiment and tamper with that framework, pushing the dubious 'boundaries' or limitations imposed by the concept as far as they possibly could, in a bold attempt to see just how far they could go with 'Doctor Who'...and what they could really expect to get away with. With 'The Romans' they came dangerously close to breaking-point, for the serial took 'Doctor Who' into the hitherto unexplored realms of pure comedy, the first broad use of humour since the series began, and I think it has to be said that it just didn't work.

However, it's necessary to qualify the above statement. 'The Romans' was intended to be nothing more than a comedy, and in that respect it is quite successful. Where it fails, as any comedy is bound to, is in being dramatic. The whole situation and the characters involved are too divorced from reality, too larger-than-life to be believable in any way. The problem with 'The Romans' is that it is too funny. Dennis Spooner's script, finally revolving rather predictably around the burning of Rome, with Nero playing his lyre amidst the holocaust, goes absolutely overboard for laughs in some places - some of them subtle, others painfully unsubtle. After the relative sombreness of the previous eleven serials, which at this point constituted the 'Doctor Who' myth, 'The Romans' is to say the least startling and, to my mind, a mistake.

The cliffhanger (in the most literal sense of the word) from 'The Rescue', with the TARDIS toppling off a cliff-ledge, is nicely resolved with the travellers relaxing in the luxuriant surroundings of a temporarily vacated Roman villa. For once we see the Doctor and his companions 'at play', as they have absolutely nothing to do but rest. Newcomer Vicki has very little to contribute here (as she has throughout the rest of the story), sticking by the Doctor's side, looking cute as she tends to; but the relationship between the Doctor and his two old friends, Ian and Barbara, is very nicely drawn, if a bit on the cosy side by now. The fear, distrust and downright animosity of the first season has almost totally dispersed by now, and there are some very amusing exchanges between the threesome in their first scenes, particularly with the Doctor's response to Barbara's admission that she has been feeding the old man ant's eggs as part of his meal: "What do you think I am, a goldfish?" In fact, of the three original regulars, the Doctor is the most unusually changed in 'The Romans'. Throughout their 'ordeals' and 'adventures' (if such a pantomime story can be described as such) Ian and Barbara remain quite true to form; but the Doctor has, almost overnight, become a wise-cracking comedian, whose wit ranges from the very subtle ("She keeps her eye on all the lyres" of Vicki, when telling a gauntlet of blatant untruths to the Centurion who discovers them on an open road and believes the Doctor to be the noted lyre-player Maximus Pettulian.), to the absolutely excruciating (His run of awful puns during his final conversation with Nero, when they discuss the Doctor's forthcoming 'performance' in the Arena...to an audience of lions! - See 'Drama Extract' - '12-04'.). Strangely enough, by the end of the serial the Doctor, with his aggravating habit of chuckling inanely at almost everything and everyone, is becoming, heretical as it may

sound, rather irritating. There's no doubt that the character is still quite matchless, with an arch cunning second to none; but with the 'sting' taken out of the portrayal, and the character becoming less and less anti-heroic, although thankfully not more and more the typical hero-figure, the strong fascination isn't really there anymore. The Doctor still makes for compelling viewing, but 'The Romans' does show definite pointers for the future, to a time when the character could easily become a little wearing and even, on occasion, tedious.

'The Romans' as a story then...what story there is. As mentioned above, it's little more than high comedy, and has been described on more than one occasion as "pure farce". This latter description is a little too strong, because it never really sinks that low, though admittedly it comes close once or twice. The notorious sequences where the lead characters all narrowly miss each other via a Brian Rix-like situation of running in and out of various rooms is never quite as bad as the description suggests, for these scenes are quite cleverly done.

'The Romans' is a story where the odd pleasing moment occurs occasionally, but the story itself is not one of these pleasing moments; as it's just an excuse for comedy, and real plot goes out of the window. Although Ian and Barbara's separate tribulations are of passing interest, the plot doesn't bear strong examination. The idea behind the story is to show how the Doctor, in a roundabout fashion, is responsible for giving Nero the idea of setting fire to Rome. That particular idea comes off very well, but the road to that conclusion is a little on the slow side, with very little visually to sustain it, and not a great deal in the supporting cast to keep the interest. Characters such as Tavius (Michael Peake) and Nero's scheming wife, Poppaea (Kay Patrick), are all competent, but the one commanding, overpowering figure of the serial, eclipsing even the Doctor himself for once, is Nero, played to comic excess by comedy actor Derek Francis. However, his over-humorous performance, involving him rolling around like an inept, rather retarded man with childish tendencies and an eye for the ladies, hardly goes a long way towards creating a believable figure for Nero. Then again, though, believability and real, three-dimensional people isn't what 'The Romans' is about.

Production is as good as ever. Particularly impressive is the Roman villa in which the Doctor and his crew are holidaying, and all the other sets are nicely constructed to give a very good, authentic Roman feel to the production, although one or two of the backdrops aren't quite as impressive as is normal in 'Doctor Who'.

To guage 'The Romans' adequately, it is really necessary to compare it with the historical serials which preceded it; but to mention it in the same breath as the like of 'Marco Polo' and 'The Aztecs' would be to do a grave injustice to a story which really can't afford many more injustices heaped upon it before it becomes totally worthless. It just doesn't stand comparison, as it has no real, discernibly interesting plot to compel the viewer to stay with it; and in some places it is just plain embarrassing. Sadly, 'The Romans' heralded the down-grading of the historical adventure after the successes of the first season. The epic-length travellogue, 'Marco Polo' (See 'Marco Polo' - '4-04') was now to be bracketed with a skit on the Roman Empire - and, although a couple more historical adventures were already in production, another nail had effectively been knocked into their coffin.

Attempting to introduce humour into 'Doctor Who' was a bold, innovative step, for it is the series' sense of humour that has helped garner it its reputation and its success over the years. Although 'Doctor Who' has attempted comedy several times since 'The Romans' - but perhaps not quite so blatantly - it isn't being too extreme to say that the return of the historical story, in this case, after a three story hiatus, was something of a disaster. A well-intentioned disaster, perhaps, but a disaster nonetheless.

CHARACTER PROFILES.

JOHN PEEL

SEVCHERIA: "She wouldn't fetch any price at all in the auctions. She's to be taken to the circus...and thrown in the Arena."

Sevcheria is a callous slave-trader, who also works at procuring acts for the Arena. With his junior partner, Didius, they have returned from a slaving expedition short of a few good slaves. They capture Ian and Barbara, feeling secure from discovery, as they are interested only in the profit they can make on the deal. Sevcheria's greed backfires on him when he tries to stop Delos - one of his escaped slaves - and Delos kills him with a burning torch.

ASCARIS: A mute assassin, Ascaris is hired by the Centurion to kill Maximus Pettulian. When the Doctor impersonates the dead lyre-player Ascaris has a "second" attempt, only to be virtually hurled bodily out of a first-floor window by the Doctor. He then decides to give up on this task.

DELOS: "I promise you, Ian - if I win, I'll make it quick for you."

Delos is a Greek, met by Ian when both are condemned to row in a Roman galley. Delos rapidly makes friends with Ian, saving his life when the galley is sunk in a storm. Delos feels protective towards Ian, and helps him in his quest to find Barbara, a quest which Delos finds crazy. Offered the chance to fight Ian and freedom for the winner, it looks for a moment as if Delos will slay his friend to escape; but he doesn't - he attacks the Emperor instead. Both men escape together as the fire of Rome is started, the loyal Delos heading back towards Greece, promising that he'll never be recaptured. Wise, cunning and a cynical realist, he makes a good companion for the more headstrong and untrained Ian.

TAVIUS: "Escape you mean? Of course I can stop you, but I think you should consider it very seriously. If you should escape and be recaptured, it would mean your death."

In the midst of the intrigue at court, Barbara finds her only friend to be the slave-supervisor, Tavius. Impressed with her kind manner to a fellow slave, he buys her for a handmaiden to Poppaea. Eventually, he helps both her and Ian to escape. But there is another side to his character - he is plotting, with the real Maximus Pettulian, to kill Nero and restore sanity to the Rome torn apart by Nero's foibles. The plot fails, but he aids "Maximus" to escape as well. His motivations are firmly grounded in his faith in the new religion of the Roman Empire - Christianity.

TIGILINUS: Another mute, Tigilinus is the personal slave of Nero. He helps Nero to dress, and has to attempt to placate the tyrant's every whim. This is, of course, impossible, and Nero quite often finds Tigilinus's devotion a thorough inconvenience. Eventually, informed by the Doctor that his drink is poisoned, Nero gives it to his slave, and orders him to drink. Tigilinus chokes, and dies; Nero merely murmurs, "He was right!"

LOCUSTA: "No-one's ordered it yet. But they will - they will..."

A respected member of the household, Locusta is the official poisoner. Taking great pride in her work, she mixes new, deadlier brews all day, supplying them to various people wanting to be rid of some-

one. "It's nothing to do with me personally, is it?" she remarks to Vicki about her job. Someone has to supply the poisons - she has never killed anyone herself. Thanks to the Doctor, though, one of her brews fails, and a furious Poppaea orders Locusta to be thrown to the lions.

POPPAEA: "I like being Empress - and I intend to remain so!"

No-one married to Nero could be lovable, but Poppaea is an extremist. Vicious, spiteful and deadly insecure, she takes an instant dislike to Barbara, as the new slave catches Nero's fancy. Convinced that Barbara is angling to replace her as Empress, she tells Locusta to brew a special potion. The potion fails, and the furious Empress strikes at Locusta instead. Poppaea is vain, greedy and arrogant, and the only person in Rome who dares to answer Nero back. But she retains his affections - mostly - by humouring him, flattering and treating him like a spoilt child.

NERO: "They wouldn't let me build my new Rome. But if the old one is burnt...if it goes up in flames, they'll have no choice! Rome will be rebuilt to my design! Brilliant! Brilliant!"

The Emperor of the Roman Empire is nothing but an overgrown, spoilt child, with spates of evil temper and childish sulks. He is vain, loving only to be praised, especially for his lyre-playing, which is hardly praiseworthy. He has to command the centre of attention constantly, and cannot abide anyone else being praised. When "Maximus" is applauded for his silent "concert", Nero is furious: he has been made a fool of, for "no-one gets applause like that except me!" Pettulian, like all against whom the Emperor has a grudge, must die. Feeling frustrated, he goes along to the gladiatorial school. "I feel like seeing someone hurt, myself, tonight," he remarks to Barbara. He revels in violence - to others! - and enjoys inflicting pain and misery. But he also enjoys giving out expensive gifts, especially to pretty slave-girls...

Frustrated in his plans for rebuilding Rome, he takes inspiration from the Doctor's accidentally setting fire to his plans for the new city. Hiring men, he orders them to fire the old houses, and to kill any honest citizen who tries to stop them. "A new city will arise from the flames! Neropolis? Nerosisum? Or just plain Nero?" As the old city goes up in flames, he sits and strums at his lyre, laughing in childish glee. The damage to property, the awful loss of life, mean nothing to him. His new city can be built now, and that is all that is of interest to him. Like any child, Nero simply has no thought of any depth for the feelings of others. At one moment, he can thank the Doctor for saving him from poison - and the next plan to set the lions on him in the Arena for playing his lyre too well...

"Derek Francis wasn't my first choice for the part, as Nero was in his thirties when he died, and Derek just didn't look that young. But he was a friend of Jackie Hill's husband (Alvin Rakoff), and had been promised a part by Verity almost from the first story. He was offered the role of Nero because he was a friend of the family, and I couldn't resist writing in the sequence when he tried to seduce Barbara. "Best friends always try to seduce the wife", I told him..."

DENNIS SPOONER

TECHNICAL OBSERVATIONS

The date for this story was firmly set at July 64 AD - the time of the great fire of Rome.

As with 'The Aztecs' (serial "F") great use was made of painted back-drops to give depth to the villa and palace sets.

Stunt arranger Peter Diamond (who played Delos in the story) devised an extraordinary 'slapstick' fight scene between the Doctor (William Hartnell) and the mute assassin, Ascaris (Barry Jackson) in episode two. Done very much in the 'silent movie' mould, it featured a props fight between the two contenders, with prop vases filled with water, curtain drapes and balsa wood chairs all being used to good effect. The fight ended with Ascaris diving voluntarily out of the window.

Photo-caption slides were used to establish scenes in Rome. 'Quo Vadis' style lettering proclaimed the name "ROMA" as the title zoomed into foreground over the transparencies.

Stock footage of a galley ship at sea was used in episode two. Episodes two and three used stock footage of lions and tigers in zoo surroundings. One all-too-obvious zoo shot was omitted from the rerun in episode three's opening reprise.

Stock footage of a storm at sea was used for the sinking of the galley ship. These frames were intermixed with the live action wherein the effect was captured by use of rolling cameras, falling scenery and buckets of water being periodically tossed over the actors.

Episode three, "Conspiracy", did not go out at the time scheduled in the morning newspapers due to the over-running of the state funeral of Sir Winston Churchill on 30th. January 1965.

Ray Cusick designed and drew a replica of Caesar Nero's plan of the new Rome. For safety reasons the scene of the Doctor's glasses setting fire to the plans was done as a pre-filmed insert.

A two-dimensional photo cut-out model was built to show Rome burning from a distance as seen by the Doctor and Vicki. Stock footage of burning buildings was edited in for this sequence, the centre-piece of which was a shot of Nero laughing maniacally and playing his lyre. Flame effects were superimposed over this shot.

The story was intentionally contrived so that the Doctor and Vicki never knew of Ian and Barbara's presence in Rome, even though they were in the same palace together. This fact was only revealed to Vicki in the next serial, 'The Web Planet'.

'The Romans' was the last story to feature Mervyn Pinfield in the roles of Associate Producer and technical advisor.

DOCTOR WHO - AN ADVENTURE IN SPACE AND TIME

SERIES EDITOR...TIM ROBINS
DEPUTY EDITOR.GARY HOPKINS
ARTWORK..STUART GLAZEBROOK
DROG
JOHN PEEL

WRITERS.....JEREMY BENTHAM
GARY HOPKINS
PAUL MOUNT
JOHN PEEL

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PRODUCTION CREDITS

Compiled by GARY HOPKINS

SERIAL "M" FOUR EPISODES BLACK AND WHITE

"THE SLAVE TRADERS"	-	16th. January 1965
"ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME"	-	23rd. January 1965
"CONSPIRACY"	-	30th. January 1965
"INFERNO"	-	6th. February 1965

CAST

DOCTOR WHO.....WILLIAM HARTNELL
IAN CHESTERTON.....WILLIAM RUSSELL
BARBARA WRIGHT.....JACQUELINE HILL
VICKI.....MAUREEN O'BRIEN

SEVCHERIA.....DEREK SYDNEY
DIDIUS.....NICHOLAS EVANS
CENTURION.....DENNIS EDWARDS
STALLHOLDER.....MARGOT THOMAS
SLAVE BUYER.....EDWARD KELSEY
MAXIMUS PETTULIAN.BART ALLISON
ASCARIS.....BARRY JACKSON
DELOS.....PETER DIAMOND
TAVIUS.....MICHAEL PEAKE
WOMAN SLAVE
DOROTHY-ROSE GRIBBLE

GALLEY MASTER.GERTAN KLAUBER
FIRST MAN IN MARKET
ERNEST JENNINGS
SECOND MAN IN MARKET
JOHN CAESAR
COURT MESSENGER.TONY LAMBDEN
NERO.....DEREK FRANCIS
TIGILINUS....BRIAN PROUDFOOT
POPPAEA.....KAY PATRICK
LOCUSTA.....ANN TIRARD

CREW

FIGHT ARRANGER.....PETER DIAMOND
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT.....DAVID MALONEY
ASSISTANT FLOOR MANAGER..VALERIE WILKINS
LIGHTING.....HOWARD KING
SOUND.....RICHARD CHUBB
COSTUME SUPERVISOR.....DAPHNE DARE
MAKE-UP SUPERVISOR.....SONIA MARKHAM
INCIDENTAL MUSIC.....RAYMOND JONES
STORY EDITOR.....DENNIS SPOONER
DESIGNER.....RAYMOND P. CUSICK
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER.....MERVYN PINFIELD
PRODUCER.....VERITY LAMBERT
DIRECTOR.....CHRISTOPHER BARRY

"Verity wanted to try a comedy, as we'd tried virtually everything else in the show; but I don't think that pure comedy works in 'Doctor Who'. There had been a classic Nero in 'Quo Vadis', so I suppose we were sending up 'Quo Vadis'. There was this 'Carry On...' film in production - 'Carry On Cleo' - and at that time I virtually lived next door to Jim Dale, who was in the film. When I was writing 'The Romans', I went down to Pinewood to watch Jim in the filming; so my story was heavily influenced by 'Carry On Cleo'. We had the same researcher, and the 'Carry On...' films were never very serious with their research...Gertan Klauber was in both; that wasn't a coincidence - that's where it all came from!"

DENNIS SPOONER